

# Sea Otter



Common Name: **sea otter**

Class: **Mammalia**

Order: **Carnivora**

Family: **Mustelidae**

Genus species: **Enhydra lutris**

**Status:** Sea otters once lived along most of the coastal North Pacific Ocean. That was before fur traders hunted them for their thick, luxurious pelts. By the year 1900, sea otters were nearly extinct. Today they're protected. The California population is still small--about 2,000 sea otters spread over only about 226 km (140 mi.) of central California coastline. California sea otters are listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act.

## Fun Facts

1. Two separate populations of sea otters live in North America: Alaska sea otters and California sea otters.
2. The sea otter's brown to black fur is the finest and densest of any animal fur. On a large animal, there an estimated 650,000 hairs per square inch. A sea otter relies on its fur to keep it warm--it doesn't have blubber as other marine mammals do. Natural oils in a sea otter's fur repel water and trap tiny air bubbles, providing a layer of warm air between the otter's skin and the harsh elements of its environment.
3. Sea otters spend up to 48% of the daylight hours grooming their fur. They groom by rubbing fur with their forepaws. Their strong claws comb and rake the fur. Then they roll and whirl in the water to smooth their fur.
4. Sea otters sleep, rest, and usually swim on their backs. California sea otters spend almost all of their time in the water. Alaska Sea otters often sleep, groom, and nurse on land.
5. Because they rely on their dense fur for insulation from the chilly ocean water, sea otters are particularly vulnerable to the detrimental effects of an oil spill. If a sea otter swims into an oil spill, the fur becomes soiled and loses its insulating qualities, allowing water to penetrate to the skin and causing hypothermia and ultimately, death.

**CABRILLO MARINE AQUARIUM  
VIRGINIA REID MOORE  
MARINE RESEARCH LIBRARY**

Cabrillo Marine Aquarium's Online Research & Education for Conservation Efforts  
<http://www.cabrillomarineaquarium.org/research-conservation.asp>

CMA Online Catalog  
<http://cabrillo.mysurpass.net/>

CMA's Sea Otter Species Description  
<http://www.cabrillomarineaquarium.org/exhibits/social-species-details.asp?id=47>

**Otter Conservation and Education Websites**

Friends of the Sea Otter <http://www.seaotters.org/>

Monterey Bay Aquarium <http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/efc/otter.aspx>

Sea Otter Images <http://www.arkive.org/sea-otter/enhydra-lutris/videos.html>

Precipice of Survival: The Southern Sea Otter <http://online.wr.usgs.gov/outreach/otter/>

National Geographic: <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/sea-otter/>

Defenders of Wildlife  
[http://www.defenders.org/wildlife\\_and\\_habitat/wildlife/sea\\_otter.php](http://www.defenders.org/wildlife_and_habitat/wildlife/sea_otter.php)

The Marine Mammal Center <http://www.marinemammalcenter.org/education/marine-mammal-information/sea-otter.html>